Racing family affair for Mintey clan

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But what stands out like a checkered flag is that there really is no reason why.

Why, in fact, doesn't even exist for young stock driver Patrick Mintey, Jr., who, at 23, has little time to ask those kinds of questions.

Young Mintey, like his father who raced many times alongside Richard Petty and Bobby Allison at the big Winston Cup races, is too busy driving, repairing and building stock cars to wonder why he does what he does.

The smell of rubber and the sound of engines roaring are in his blood, passed on from father to son like old race tires are passed down from the Winston Cup cars to those cars going around the Saugus Speedway in the lower level stock races.

In the feature stock event Saturday, Mintey finished out of the money, dropping out of the race after only nine laps with low oil pressure and a blown cam.

As an added incentive, though, he was racing with some of Petty's old Winston Cup tires, given as a gift from the famous driver in order to cut expenses.

And considering it was his first race in two years since returning from Canada on a mission for the Mormon Church, in which he and his father are both devoted followers, the young driver had nothing to be ashamed about.

To make things even tougher, he was also driving a brand-spanking new car.

The car was a project built from scratch at home in the garage, the whole family working around the clock for three months, finishing last-minute alterations only hours before race time.

Photo by John Demos

Speed racer

Patrick Mintey Jr. takes some practice laps around Saugus Speedway Saturday. Car problems forced Mintey to drop out of the featured event after nine laps.

"It's good to be back racing again and it's still in my blood," said Mintey Jr. "Sometimes people think it's unusual that I'm a Mormon and a race driver, but really I couldn't do one without the other."

For the last two years, he spent his time behind the wheel of a bicycle in British Columbia instead of driving race cars, spreading the Mormon word door to door on a church mission.

In this tranquil setting, Mintey had time to think about his future, putting his goals and life in clearer perspective.

What resulted was a strong desire to follow in his dad's footsteps and one day, if things work out right, compete at the top level in the Winston Cup races, which is to stock drivers what Formula I is to the Grand Prix drivers.

"That's definitely my goal and competing at Saugus in the featured event is a step in that direction," said Mintey, adding that his previous experience was only in the lower level street stock category.

He continued talking about his family's roots in racing and how being a Mormon presents absolutely no conflicts.

"Dad was Rookie of the Year in the Winston circuit in 1977 and I've had the opportunity to work in the pits for Petty, which was a great experience.

"Some people, no matter what, find it strange that I'm a Mormon and also a race car driver. But really it isn't that strange. I follow the bible to the letter, abstain from drinking and smoking and all these things end up helping my driving a great deal. Being involved with the church seems to make everything else work."

Mintey says his strict Mormon beliefs bring no magical powers, but have simply taught him that there is no substitute for hard work and a strong will.

Eberling wins in opener

Gary Eberling won the featured stock race at Saugus Speedway Saturday night, blowing away more than 50 competitors en route to the 40-lap victory where he led from start to finish.

Celebrating its 50th anniversary of organized racing, there were 5,312 fans on hand to watch five different stock categories, including street, hobby, sportsman and figure eight.

John Kirby won the street stock category; Jim Grulkey, the stocker figure 8; Shannon Flavin, the hobby stock; and Scott Wade, the hobby figure 8.

Awards for the flashiest car were also given out, going to Craig Rayburn in the sportsman category and Rick Crow in the street stock.

Second place in the sportsman class went to Gary Sigman, last year's top Saugus racer. Finishing third was Will Harper from Tarzana.

In the 25-lap street stocker, Rick Winaker of Simi Valley and John Crain of Reseda finished second and third, respectively.